

Posted by u/TheStabbyBrit 2 hours ago

Humans are still Space Dwarfs

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For three weeks straight the Galactic Forum had been assembled. For three weeks they had tried and failed to resolve the growing crisis. It seemed that another war was about to start between the Grobi and the Urbexi, and this time it threatened to boil well beyond mere border skirmishes. Some feared this could be it - the great war, a war that would not end until one side was utterly destroyed. At least two species knew exactly which of the two sides it would be who faced oblivion, which was why Mul'car, the Grobi delegate found himself in a private meeting chamber with Thorgrimm Lawbringer, the representative empowered to speak on behalf of the High King of Sol and its Associated Territories.

The human, who at a pitiful 5'10" tall was the size of a Grobi child, was nevertheless a being who radiated confidence. Dressed in fine blue ceremonial garb, and with the traditional axe of office at his hip, he looked more like a LARPer than a diplomat. Not that the Grobi would ever have said as much, especially not now. "So," Thorgrimm said. He packed a great deal into those two little letters. The Grobi felt his knees go weak immediately.

"I.... I take it you are aware of our... situation?" the tall, green alien stammered.

Thorgrimm nodded, slowly and deliberately. With his left hand, the dignitary began to gently stroke his long, grey beard. His eyes fixed on the Grobi, and when he spoke again it was slowly, with purpose and care. "You want me to find some means to save your kind from war with the Urbexi, a conflict you would most certainly lose. That is a considerable ask, Mul'car of the Grobi."

"I know," the Grobi answered weakly. "I will not lie to you, human; our two species have rarely seen eye to eye, but you must surely realise that this war is bad for us all!"

"Spare me the speeches, you haven't time for that. If you wish to be saved by me, you must offer me something in return. You must pay a price worthy of the cost in lives that will result. I want you on your knees, Grobi. I want you to beg."

After only a brief pause, Mul'car folded himself down onto his knees before Thorgrimm. He bent low and pressed his bulbous forehead into the carpet between the human's boots. "Please, Thorgrimm Lawbringer, I beg you to save my species from the coming war!"

Thorgrimm bent over and patted Mul'car on the head as though he were a sad little puppy. "That'll do, Grobi. Now leave the rest to me."

When Thorgrimm and his retainers reached the Forum the entire room was in uproar. The Urbexi delegation had centre stage, led by Zanotar - a bronze-skinned beast of immense physicality and a head crowned with towering antlers. "I am through talking!"

the beast-thing bellowed. "We have talked and talked for weeks, and nothing has been resolved! It is now time to settle this matter through force of arms!"

"At long last, something delegate Zanotar and I agree on!" Thorgrimm shouted as he marched to his place in the ring of representatives. His outburst caused a brief stillness from the other delegates as they turned in confusion. Before anyone else could interrupt, Thorgrimm continued, "honourable representative of the Urbexi delegation, I agree that we should now turn this timewasting banter into a contest of arms. However, it will be a regulated contest."

"You are not empowered to dictate terms of war, human!" Zanotar shouted back.

Thorgrimm's eyebrows furrowed in anger. His right hand closed around the ceremonial axe. As he raised the blade up for all to see he spoke with a cold, focused tone, "This axe I carry is a reminder of my purpose here, a mindful weight upon my hip as to the consequences of failure. If words alone cannot maintain order, I am to bury this axe into the table of peace and sunder the Book of Law. With that act, a state of war will exist between my species and yours, and it shall continue until one of us has been purged from the galaxy."

Fresh mutterings filled the hall. "You would throw yourselves in with the Grobi? Why?"

"Because you no longer wish to speak. They do." Thorgrimm's eyes shone with terrible purpose as he raised the axe high above his head. "The axe falls, Zanotar of the Urbexi!"

"Wait!" Zanotar snorted. "I will indulge you... for now. You wish for there to be rules to the war?"

The entire Forum held its collective breath, watching the terrible still of Thorgrimm. At last, with reverential care, he returned the axe to its proper place at his hip. The human took a moment to straighten his beard before clasping his hands behind his back and smiling, calmly, as though nothing had happened. "Yes, honourable friend, there will be rules. It will be a codified and contained conflict, one that-

"No, stop! We will not allow you to spend the next ten years writing a damn encyclopedia to arbitrate for every potential event in our war with the Grobi!"

Thorgrimm took the interruption in his stride, "a fair statement. You have wasted so much time already, I can understand why you are so impatient. Although it goes against everything I believe in, I am willing to offer you..." the old human winced as though in pain, "a verbal contract. Short, in plain English, nothing written down and settled with the shake of the hand. Will that be acceptable?"

Zanotar studied the human carefully, scrutinizing his elderly features for any sign of trickery or deception. "This is not like you, Thorgrimm Lawbringer, but it does seem acceptable. What are the terms?"

"Six terms, and six terms only. Is that acceptable?"

"That depends on what they are. Name them." The Urbexi answered.

Thorgrimm nodded. "First: The war will be fought between named combatants only. Each side may bid a single army, an entire nation, or their entire species, but no more than what is expressly bid. Second: The war continues until one side's government declares surrender, or until the Galactic Forum judges one side is incapable of offering meaningful resistance. Third: The victor agrees to ensure fair and decent treatment of the vanquished, providing them proper living conditions, food, resources and so on. Fourth: The vanquished shall agree never again to take up arms against the victor. Five: the victor shall agree not to wage any form of offensive warfare for twenty years galactic standard following the end of this war. Six: If these terms are violated, the ENTIRE Galactic Forum shall agree to enter a state of total war against the transgressing party!" The last condition caused a great deal of commotion, and a flicker of doubt briefly passed over Zanotar's bestial features. "Will you accept these terms, honourable friend?"

To his credit, the Urbexi took some time to puzzle through what Thorgrimm had said. His eyes swiveled back and forth as if reading a contract, puzzling through the words. His mouth chewed each sentence silently, looking for the bitter tang of trickery he felt certain would be present. "What is 'fair and decent treatment' by the standards of this agreement?"

Thorgrimm gave a gentle chuckle, "Ah, I'm so proud of you! You're almost thinking like a human! No need for suspicion here; it means exactly what you think it means. So long as it wouldn't get you charged with acts of cruelty towards living beings, it's acceptable."

Zanotar's eyes narrowed. "Then what is the catch, human?"

"The catch? Well now, the catch is you aren't fighting the Grobi. As the defender in this war I bid... Huuumanity!" Thorgrimm announced, stressing the word 'humanity' with uncharacteristic drama.

"Wait, what? You are going to fight on behalf of the Grobi?"

"I do believe the defender has been bid, friend. Care to bid the attacker?"

The Urbexi's head glanced about the room as though looking for support from the other alien delegates. "Then... if you bid all of humanity, I shall bid the entire Urbexi species."

Thorgrimm raised an eyebrow briefly. His old, stumpy arm raised to offer a handshake to Zanotar. "Shake if you agree, and wish to be bound before all present to this spoken contract. The entire Urbexi species shall be bid as the aggressor in a war against Hu-manity."

Once again, the odd inflection. The Urbexi hesitated. "Why do you keep saying 'humanity' that way?"

"Hu-manity is the proper pronunciation of the defender's name, I assure you. Will you shake?"

A quiet murmur began to spread through the assembly, for now doubt and fear were clear to see upon Zanotar's features. He shook himself, bared his squared teeth and grunted fiercely to psych himself up before grasping Thorgrimm's hand tightly. "I accept your offer of war, human!"

The two shook, and broke apart. There was a pause that followed, broken only by a quiet cough from someone at the back. Thorgrimm seemed utterly unconcerned that he had just pledged his entire species to war. That bothered everyone, the Urbexi most of all. "I... I think, in the interests of respecting the Galactic Community, we should consider this place neutral ground. Do you agree, Thorgrimm?"

"Hmm? Oh, no. That'd be a complete waste of time. After all, we can just pop downstairs to the aquarium and you can end the entire war with a single bullet."

"Wait, what?"

Thorgrimm wasn't listening. The human and his attendants were both heading for the doors. "Come along, Zanotar! Let's get this war over and done so we can all clock off and grab a pint!"

The entire Forum followed the trio of humans as they headed out of the diplomatic building, winding down the outside staircase to the recreational complex and, as promised, the aquarium. Zanotar led the pack, shaking with equal parts anger and fear as he hurried so close behind Thorgrimm the tiny human was almost crushed on two occasions. At last, Thorgrimm came to the railing in front of a large freshwater tank. Inside was a large, grey animal that resembled a fish, albeit one made out of clay by a child with no talent for fine detail. Thorgrimm tapped the railing's information panel and announced, "Zanotar, meet Hu Manatee, your opponent!"

The Urbexi stomped over and looked at the display. "this isn't a human, it's a manatee! A... manatee named 'Hu Manatee'. Hu manity. Oh..."

"Oh indeed," Thorgrimm replied with a smile.

In the end, everyone present agreed that the Urbexi had won the war by default. Not that their representative seemed particularly proud of his victory. He meekly agreed to fund the aquarium exhibit for as long as the manatee wished to stay there, and then slunk away to have a cry in private. The rest of the Forum were much more pleased with the outcome, and many took the opportunity to congratulate Thorgrimm on securing the galaxy twenty years of peace. The last to approach was Mul'car, the

Grobi. He crept up on the squat human as if afraid he'd be pounced upon, but Thorgrimm seemed content to watch the aquarium. "Thorgrimm? I... I cannot thank you enough."

"I haven't exactly done your kind a favour, Grobi. You have twenty years to prepare, and I hope you can prepare well. I'm not sure I'll still be here to drag you out of the fire next time."

"We will not squander the time you've given us, I swear it!" Mul'car answered earnestly, but Thorgrimm scoffed at the pledge.

"Hah! Grobi vows are like toilet paper! One quick kiss of the arse, then they're flushed and forgotten!" Thorgrimm glanced up at the tall, lanky alien. "But I guess the old saying is true. The enemy of my enemy-

"-is my friend?" Mul'car finished.

"-dies next," Thorgrimm corrected with a smirk. "Although, I suppose your version works too. Jog on, Grobi! Go home to your sad little corner of the galaxy and take the credit for my hard work, like you always do. Just make sure your leaders never forget one thing above all else: don't ever mess with Hu Manatee!"